United Nations A/53/209/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 October 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 68
Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia

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Note by the Secretary-General

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[Original: English]
[29 September 1998]

The United States of America supports the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones, consistent with our long-standing criteria for such zones and with the decision on principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In the interest of promoting regional stability and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to South Asia, the United States has supported resolutions in the United Nations endorsing in principle the concept of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia. In addition to making a strong contribution to non-proliferation in general, a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia would help avoid a competition in nuclear arms between Pakistan and India.

The recent nuclear tests carried out by India and subsequently Pakistan have, unfortunately, moved the world further away from this goal. We are concerned that the tests have aggravated tensions between India and Pakistan and have added a new dimension to their long-standing arms competition.

The international community reacted strongly in opposition to these tests and outlined, in Security Council resolution 1172 (1998) of 6 June 1998, a series of common objectives – or benchmarks – for defusing tensions between India and Pakistan, bringing the two States into global non-proliferation regimes, and strengthening those regimes worldwide.

It is important for all States interested in stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, in fostering an environment conducive to nuclear disarmament and in establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones to continue to press for major progress on non-proliferation by India and Pakistan, in particular, by meeting the benchmarks.

We encourage the States in the region to embark on a process of mutual transparency and confidence-building. The experiences and solutions of other States, notably Argentina and Brazil, may prove useful in addressing the political and security challenges in the region.